

December 6, 2015

Solving Non-Existent Problems or Creating New Ones with a “New School Day”, Part 1

LFHS parents and other stakeholders have been alerted to three “community engagement [meetings](#) December 7, 8 and 9, 2015 to “share [] process and information” about the new school day framework.” Published reports indicate a radical reformation of the LFHS school day and [Lake Forest Schools Watch](#) has obtained a draft “school day” schedule, published [herewith](#).

Before we attempt to understand what LFHS administration has proposed, it helps to return to the beginning:

Was there ever an articulated reason, substantiated by evidence of any kind, that changing the school day from its present form to something else, would have a positive impact on student outcomes (however defined)? The answer is “no.” Once again, our students are guinea pigs for an ill-defined experiment based on anecdote and having nothing to do with world-class education.

Like many of you, I attended one of the meetings at which the “hopes and dreams” of parents were solicited regarding the new school schedule. When I, perhaps like you, attempted to inquire whether any analysis had been done necessitating a change from the current schedule and how or whether the institution of a “block schedule” or any variation thereof was outweighed (even a little) by the implementation challenges (including loss of instructional time), I was told that the meeting I attended was an inquiry, not a discussion. In short, the question wasn’t answered.

Instead, various unidentified people threw out their “hopes and dreams” for a new school day and these were duly written on a white board. Anecdotes were shared about how difficult it was to rouse sleeping teens in the morning. Other comments were made about field trips. No fact-based rationale for a change in the school day schedule (not anecdotes) and how that change would have a net positive impact on (any) student outcomes was ever presented.

Nevertheless, according to interviews conducted by the [Daily North Shore](#), a “proposed” “hybrid” schedule effective in the 2016-17 school year will make significant changes to the traditional school day.

According to the [Daily North Shore](#), “The plan was devised by a schedule committee made up of 20 teachers and 10 administrators who have held 20 meetings with students, parents, teachers and staff, according to a presentation [Principal Chala] Holland made at [a recent] board meeting. She said the schedule is not yet set in stone.”

*Twenty meetings*, and not one of them presented hard evidence substantiating a problem with the present schedule, necessitating a change.

Continuing, the [Daily North Shore](#) reports: “Though the plan is not final yet, Holland and [Lori] Wilcox said the final schedule will not need approval from either the board or the Lake Forest Education Association teachers’ union.” Lori Wilcox, currently Assistant Superintendent for “growth, talent and human relations” is [leaving LFHS](#) for another position in July 2015 and will thus be unavailable to defend the decision to experiment on our children by implementing the “hybrid” schedule.

“The scheduling committee approved this structure for next year’s daily schedule but many details are still evolving,” Holland said.

According to the proposed schedule, instead of classes beginning at 7:50 am every day, classes will begin at 8:15 a.m. Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays while commencing at 8:50 a.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays. Working parents may find this problematic: they must now trust that their teens will make it to school without their early morning guidance and supervision. And remember, there has been no evidence presented to suggest that a 25 minute delay in the start of the school day (three days a week) and an hour's delay (two days a week) will make any positive, material difference for student outcomes. Nor has any analysis been presented about whether changing school start times and reshuffling the school day schedule twice a week is developmentally appropriate for teens who are already juggling a multitude of social, emotional and educational challenges. To make matters worse, Principal Holland told the *Daily North Shore*: "School will let out later but the precise time is uncertain." Let's hope our LFHS athletes understand the word "forfeit" is not a reflection on their athletic abilities. Or will those students on sports teams enjoy an earlier dismissal than non-athletes on Wednesdays and Thursdays?

Sadly, the proposed schedule eradicates student lunch periods as they currently exist. Based on the draft proposal it appears there will be three lunch "periods" labeled A, B & C. Each will be 25 minutes in length. Lunch A is between 3rd and 4th period. Lunch B is between 4th and 5th. Lunch C is between 5th and 6th. Because of this, not all "4th Period" classes will begin at the same time and not all "5th period" classes will begin at the same time, either. On the two block days, the lunch period (still 25 minutes) will most likely be determined by the teacher of that class.

Tell your rising Seniors and others with off-campus lunch passes to kiss off- campus lunch good-bye. Tell your different learner that he can't use his lunch period as a study hall to prepare for a test or do the homework he forgot. Tell your student he can't use his lunch to visit a resource center, his counselor, his social worker, his favorite teacher or simply "hang out" with her friends (whom she never sees in any of her classes). Forget scheduling any ortho or other local appointments during your kid's busy day at her lunch hour, too.

And while you're at it, tell your student to make sure he's first in line at the cafeteria for his lunch period because once the students who used to go off campus for lunch can't anymore and once his dedicated lunch period is squeezed into 25 minutes (if that), then those lunch periods may get ugly. Has anyone given a thought about feeding 400 hungry teens (roughly 1/3 of the students eating lunch per the three periods) in a mere 25 minutes?

Teachers, by the way, will still be assigned a regular lunch period (4, 5 or 6) for 45 minutes.

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